IMPLEMENTATION OF “EAST-WEST” AND “NORTH-SOUTH” TRANSPORT CORRIDORS

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Abstract

The article considers the railway and pipeline component of the “East-West” and “North-South” projects. In conclusion, it should be noted that some of the railway transport projects have been completed. For the further development of these projects, new railway lines are being built for the implementation of the expected to provide new areas that need to be freed from new developments. Some of the residential buildings have been completed for many years, and they are not included in the warrant. In my opinion, it is necessary to take this into account, as well as to increase the amount of compensation, as it caused indignation in connection with this that Azerbaijani energy carriers may not be enough for mixing pipelines through the Caspian sea, it may be necessary to return to the use of energy carriers of Central Asian States. Moreover, the problem of the status of the Caspian sea between them has been solved.

On September 7-8, 1998, at the initiative of national leader Heydar Aliyev, an international conference dedicated to the restoration of the historical silk road was held in Baku with the participation of heads of states of 9 countries (Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan), delegations of 13 international organizations and 32 States. As a result of this conference, on the basis of the TRACECA program of the European Union, the "Main multilateral agreement on international transport for the development of the Europe-Caucasus-Asia corridor" was signed and the Baku Declaration was adopted.

In accordance with the provisions of the main multilateral agreement, it was decided to host the Permanent Secretariat of the TRACECA intergovernmental Commission in Baku, and its opening was held on February, 21 2001. Thus, Azerbaijan, having contributed to the restoration of the historical silk road, played an important role in determining the main trajectories of development.

Currently, Azerbaijan is a participant of the silk road Economic belt project, implemented on the initiative of China. In December 2015, during the state visit of President Ilham Aliyev to China, the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Government of the people's Republic of China signed a Memorandum of understanding on joint promotion of the creation of the " silk road Economic belt» [10].

The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, commissioned on October 30, 2017, connecting the TRANS-European and TRANS-Asian railway networks, is the restoration of the ancient silk road on the steel highways [10].

On February 7, 2007, an Agreement on the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway was signed in Tbilisi on the initiative of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. In November of the same year, the Foundation of the railway line was laid at the Georgian point of Marabda. A groundbreaking ceremony of the Kars-Georgian border section was held in Kars in July in 2008. The 504-kilometers section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line with a total length of about 850 kilometers falls on the territory of Azerbaijan. 263 kilometers of the railway line passes through the territory of Georgia, and 79 kilometers - through the territory of Turkey.

Compared to sea transportation, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway cut more than by half of the delivery time of goods from China to Europe. The Baku-Tbilisi - Kars railway, which serves stability and security, is planned to transport 5 million tons a year in the first stage, 17 million tons in the second stage, and subsequently an even larger volume of cargo [10].

The silk road as an international corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia will contribute to the integration of the Caucasus into the Eurasian economy. And on this way cities act not just as a transit resource, but also as consumers of transit goods and suppliers of their own products [34; p. 197].

Azerbaijan is becoming an increasingly important transit center by ensuring the successful transportation and exchange of goods between China, Central Asia and Europe through the port of Alat. These are important steps for The new silk road in terms of regional significance. The new silk road of Azerbaijan as an alternative route by land creates a special opportunity for the unification of the East-West routes, as well as a new North-South transport corridor, uniting the products of East Asia and South Asia.

Azerbaijan's location in a strategically important geopolitical space – at the intersection of the most important international transport and communication corridors stretching from East to West and from North to South-has kept it in the sphere of special interests of transnational world forces for centuries [11; p. 4].

Azerbaijan, being a bridge between Europe and Asia, is turning into a country with very large transit opportunities. The routes from East to West and from North to South pass through Azerbaijan, which turns our country into a profitable logistics center, connecting most of the trade routes between the West, East and South. Due to the favourable location of the country, the availability of necessary transport infrastructures, including the newly built Baku international commercial sea port, Azerbaijan is becoming a logistics center of strategic importance for the entire Eurasian region [4].

A number of large-scale infrastructure projects have been implemented in the transport sector of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The construction of the Baku international commercial sea port complex, modern airports, roads of international importance and the renewal of railway lines in the direction of the East-West and North-South transport corridors play an important role in the expansion of the country's foreign economic relations.

The great potential of trade relations between the founding countries of the international transport corridor "North-South" (Russia, Iran, India) necessitates the widespread use of favourable transit opportunities of the Republic of Azerbaijan as a member of this corridor, as well as the adoption of urgent measures to coordinate the Azerbaijani Railways with the network of Iranian Railways [44; p. 4-5].

The policy of turning Azerbaijan into an international transport hub was one of the two main strategic courses pursued by the state since 1993 in the field of foreign economic and geopolitical relations. Experts particularly note several important directions in this process, monitored in the activities of Azerbaijan. This is the development of economic, trade, transport and logistics links between Europe, the black sea, Caucasus, Caspian and Central Asian regions; development of a multimodal corridor laid along the shortest land route between China and the European Union; - laying of an International transport corridor "North-South"; involving of transit goods within the Framework of the great silk road; significant improvement of logistics and trade infrastructure and transformation of Azerbaijan into a more attractive hub in the region in this area due to regulatory incentives; coordination of [11; p. 4].

Azerbaijan has shown a particular interest since the beginning of the third Millennium and has actively joined it in recent years, as well as the functionality of which will seriously increase from now on, the North-South international transport corridor is considered» [11; p. 4].

Azerbaijan plays a Central role in this project. All transit traffic will pass through Azerbaijan. Transit transportations will require additional cargo handling, document processing. All these operations will be carried out with the help of Azerbaijan and thus they will bring financial income to our country. An important point here is that Azerbaijan invests in this railway on the territory of Iran, as a result, the transnationalization of Azerbaijani capital takes place.

The East-West transport corridor was launched in September 2009 and lasted until September 2012. Blekinge region is the leading partner of the project, and its total

budget is about 6 million euros. It includes about 70 partners from Sweden, Lithuania, Germany, Russia, Italy, China and Denmark. Some of the partners are represented by commercial organizations, in addition, the project is supported by the Swedish and Lithuanian authorities [45].

The aim of the project, within the framework of international cooperation, is to develop and implement effective, safe and environmentally friendly technologies for the delivery of goods going from East to West in the southern Baltic region. The project was prepared by stakeholders in the region for the implementation of sustainable transport planning and smart it solutions in the field of transport. Combined with business development in the transport sector, this stimulates economic growth in the entire East-West Transport corridor» [45].

Three main areas of activity:

1) Development of the East-West Transport corridor as an example of a "Green transport corridor" in accordance with the EU transport policy, as well as its compliance with modern market requirements and environmental friendliness of a transport.

2) working out of an innovative landfill, where modern technologies and information systems contribute to improving the efficiency and safety of traffic, as well as reducing the negative impact on the environment.

3) Supporting economic growth within the corridor particularly in ports and inland centres by stimulating new business models, particularly for long-term railway cooperation.

The East-West transport corridor is one of the most Central in the Northern transport axis, and currently already has a structure and organizational scheme that will make a significant contribution to the development of the transport axis and the concept of the " Green corridor» [45].

A strong network of partners will be formed through the East-West transport corridor Association, which will allow establishing long-term cooperation between among different countries.

The expected results of the project are:

* The East-West transport corridor as the best practical example of the implementation of the Green corridor concept»

•The East-West transport corridor is the part of the European Commission's action plan for the Baltic sea region and is an integral part of the Northern transport axis.

* Developed guidance on how to develop a Green corridor in line with EU policy and offer stakeholders greener transport alternatives.

* Innovative it "Brokerage information system" for traffic regulation and expansion of road information, which will contribute to improving the efficiency of transport and reduce their negative impact on the environment [45].

* Guide how to buy, sell, and plan the implementation of eco-friendly transportation that can be used by a variety of customers

* New business concepts for rail transport

* Improving of transport services at ports and terminals

•Increasing of transport competence among various stakeholders within the transport corridor "East-West» [45].

The East-West Transport corridor project was a joint project between 42 different partners-local, regional and national authorities, universities, port infrastructure representatives and private stakeholders - in Denmark, Lithuania, Russia and Sweden. The project began in 2006, the region of Blekinge County acted as the lead partner. The project was co-financed by project partners and from the INTERREG IIIB Baltic sea 2000-2006 programme. The East-West Transport corridor project is aimed at strengthening the development of the transport component through the improvement of infrastructure, development and implementation of new solutions for business and logistics, as well as cooperation between research organizations on transport flows. During the period of approximately 20 months, extensive work was carried out, resulting in a number of reports, seminars, symposia and conferences. As a result of the project there can be considered the development of proposals and business contacts between all partners of the project, consisting of spatial planners, politicians, businessmen, civil servants and researchers [45].

Azerbaijan is becoming the key part of the East-West transport corridor.

This project is aimed at restoring the historical "silk road" and should ensure the withdrawal of Chinese goods to Western markets in several directions [21].

I would like to note that the initiative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to join the North-South transport corridor, as well as the TRACECA project, belongs to national leader Heydar Aliyev. It was with his consent that representatives of the Republic of Azerbaijan participated in discussions in this direction with the relevant structures of Russia and Iran since 2001. On 19-21 may 2004, on behalf of President Ilham Aliyev, the delegation of Azerbaijan joined the meeting of the heads of Railways of Russia and Iran held in Moscow and, in accordance with the trilateral agreement, took part in the creation of The international consortium for the North-South transport corridor. In the subsequent period, its activities were ensured to attract transit goods traffic for transportation on the Railways of all three countries, the implementation of joint design and exploration works, coordination of common issues and cooperation. On July 24-27, 2005 in Tehran and February 9, 2005 in Baku construction of the North-South transport corridor, its subsequent operation, creation of the international consortium and methods of its financing, the share of each country in construction, ways of compensation of the forthcoming capital investments and other questions were discussed, the agreement was reached [11; p.4]. The main objective of the North-South transport corridor is, first of all, to reduce the delivery time of goods transported from the South, starting from India, to Russia, Northern and Western Europe, as well as to the Persian Gulf countries, reduce transportation prices and increase the functionality of the corridor. The corridor provides transportation in several main directions: India-Russia-Caucasus-Persian Gulf countries; Central Asia-Persian Gulf countries; Caspian sea-Islamic Republic of Iran-Persian Gulf countries, etc. Among these areas, the most interesting for Azerbaijan is the delivery of goods by ships from the Indian port of Mumbai to the Iranian port of Bandar

Abbas, followed by transportation by trains and cars on the existing Railways and highways of Iran to the railway and highway Qazvin-Rasht-Astara (Iran) - Astara (Azerbaijan), and from there via Azerbaijan - to Russia, Northern Europe, etc. [11; p.4].
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In 2005, Azerbaijan joined this project, offering its territory for the organization of the shortest route in the planned direction [22].
The following measures have been implemented on the part of the international transport corridor "North-South" passing through the territory of Azerbaijan:
– Construction of a new 8.3 km length road to the Astara (Azerbaijan) - Astara (Iran) railway line to the bridge over the Astarachay river, the Astarachay bridge itself and the road (1.4 km length) in Iran has been completed;
- Negotiations were held with the Iranian side in connection with the construction of the Qazvin-Rasht part (175 km) of this corridor; [32].
The North-South project has been lobbied for many years by the Russian side, which intends to draw to its territory a large part of the goods traffic between the "Northern" countries and States in The Indian ocean.
Initially, the "North-South" assumed several routes of goods using different means of transport. One of them is TRANS - Caspian, through the ports of Astrakhan, OLE, Makhachkala, by rail through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan with access to the railway network of Iran at the border crossing Tejen-Serakhs. But this option was blocked by the Iranian partners, insisting that the economic efficiency of the TRANS-Caspian multimodal route is reduced by the need for repeated transshipment of goods.
Another route was supposed to run along the Western branch of the corridor: this direction is Astrakhan-Makhachkala-Samur, then through the territories of Azerbaijan and Armenia with access to Iran through the border station Julfa. However the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia destroyed the plans of the partners of the North and the South [22].
However, due to international sanctions against Iran, the case has stalled. The line, which was to link the Azerbaijani Astara with the Iranian cities of Astara and Rasht, without the launch of which it is impossible to operate the North — South ITC, turned into a real long-term construction [26; p.65-78]

The decline in oil prices led to a decline in freight traffic. At the moment, the cost of railway supplies through Azerbaijan tends to decrease by 10-15%. The government, in its long-term strategy, hopes that tariff reductions, which may affect the transportation of container cargo, grain, cotton, sulfur, urea and metals, will overcome the decline in freight traffic [26; p.65-78].

Long negotiations led to the fact that the economic question prevailed: in last days of March 2008, the heads of the railway departments of Azerbaijan, Russia and Iran at the meeting in Tehran signed a Memorandum on the establishment of a consortium for the construction of the Qazvin - Rasht - Astara railway.

The next stage of negotiations was scheduled for may 2008 in Baku. According to Nadir Azmamedov, head of the press service of the Azerbaijan state railway (AGR), at the upcoming meeting the Russian side was to present a business project for the construction of this branch, and the Iranian side was to acquaint colleagues from Azerbaijan with the project of constructing a new bridge with a length of 101 meters across the border river.

N. Azmamedov stressed that the project of the international transport corridor implies the construction of 8.4 km tracks, 4 station tracks (each 1050 meters), customs and checkpoints, a point for changing wheelsets on the territory of Azerbaijan [22].

For Azerbaijan, in particular, the availability of rail links with Iran promises great profits. This will increase cargo traffic with Asian countries, which is now limited to road transport. In addition, Baku is diversifying its ties with Asian markets. Having an alternative: land or sea route, Azerbaijan increases its chances of attracting transit cargo [22].

In the first half of 2011, it was expected to establish a direct rail link on the route Scandinavia-Baltic States-Russia-Azerbaijan-Iran, which was supposed to connect many European and Asian countries by the shortest route [28].

However, the actual absence of a full-scale railway corridor in the Arsenal of the great silk Road significantly limits the load of the route. The presence of seaports with developed modern infrastructure on both sides of the Caspian sea, as well as railway lines that could connect the two continents, would improve the situation, would turn the Caspian basin region with access to the South Caucasus into a key transport hub of Intercontinental importance.

In this regard, the construction of a new international seaport near Baku and the implementation of the Baku - Tbilisi - Kars railway (BTK) project with access through Turkey to the markets of Central Europe play a strategic role [22].

Currently, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia, who signed the relevant agreement a year ago, are at the stage of implementing the BTK project. The construction of the Georgian section of the highway was the focus of the last meeting of the Azerbaijani-Georgian working group, which was held at the end of March in Tbilisi. The parties held consultations and detailed discussions on a number of working issues. Among them, perhaps, is the construction of a railway station in Akhalkalaki, near the Turkish-Georgian border.

If we talk about the Georgian part of the project, it is known that it was "divided" into several independent projects. One of them involves the reconstruction of existing tracks, the other-the laying of a completely new track on the sites where before the railway did not exist at all. This is the span from Akhalkalaki to the border with Turkey, which, according to the results of the tender held at the end of last year, will be built by the Azerbaijani company "Azerinshaatservice". It accounted for 33 kilometers and one tunnel [22].

The North-South transport corridor will be an alternative to the Suez canal, as it will reduce the time and, therefore, the cost of transportation by more than half. At the first stage, the corridor was planned to transport 5 million tons of cargo annually, and in the future-more than 10 million [44.p.4-5].

As a transit hub of the Caspian region, Azerbaijan has made maximum effort to take advantage of its geographical location. As part of the implementation of the transport corridors "silk road" and its part "North – South", a modern port and railway infrastructure was formed, designed for multiple growth of cargo transportation. The process of diversification of transport routes was nearing its logical conclusion. On December 07, 2015, President Ilham Aliyev ordered the acceleration of the formation of railway infrastructure in the Azerbaijani section of the North-South corridor. In 2016, the Baku - Tbilisi – Kars "steel" highway was to come into operation [30].

The order stated:

1.The Ministry of foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan jointly with the Ministry of economy and industry of Azerbaijan Republic and CJSC "Azerbaijani Railways" agree and submit to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan the draft of the framework agreement on cooperation between the Azerbaijan Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran for the coordination of the Azerbaijan Railways with network of Iranian Railways on the International transport corridor "North-South" and contracts between the relevant agencies of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the construction railway bridge over the Astara river on the state border of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran and its financing.

2.To assign to CJSC "Azerbaijan Railways" design and implementation of construction of the railway line from the railway station Astara (Azerbaijan Republic) to the state border of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and also according to the contract specified in part 1 of this Order - the railway bridge across the river Astara on the state border of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. About acceleration of works on the segment of the international transport corridor "North-South" passing through the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan [40; p.2].

This project has been repeatedly returned to. And in 2016, a historic summit was held. The first ever trilateral summit of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran was called historic. And this is not an exaggeration, because during the Baku summit meetings, in fact, the basis for a new format of regional cooperation was laid [44; p.4-5].

This meeting took place in 2016, contributed to many factors - such as the lifting of international sanctions against Iran, the establishment of Russian-Turkish relations,

overcoming the economic recession in Russia, etc. But most importantly, and this was recognized by both Tehran and Moscow, a key role was played by the mediation efforts of Baku, without whose initiatives at the highest level, nothing would have happened. During the trilateral meeting, as well as discussions in the bilateral format, a wide range of issues were touched upon: cooperation in the field of transport and communications, financial, banking and insurance sectors, free trade and in the context of this reduction of trade tariffs, investment, new production, security, the fight against terrorism, the status of the Caspian sea, etc. A common position was agreed on all the topics to some extent, so it is no coincidence that the Baku summit was in the center of analytical reviews of many world media, and, I think, future transformations in the region will attract even more attention as a result of the agreements reached [44; p.6-7].

During the 2016 Baku summit of the heads of Iran, Russia and Azerbaijan, it was the economy that came first, drawing policy and security issues to itself. The focus was on rail transport within the framework of the international transport project "North-South" and other investment infrastructure projects [44; p.6-7].

As President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev stressed in 2016, the North – South TC is a project of great importance for the participating countries. Azerbaijan is becoming an important transit hub, gaining access to the countries of the Persian Gulf and Asia. Russia receives the same benefits plus markets, for example for its grain, in which Tehran is interested, and in return can receive Iranian vegetables, fruits and other products. Not to mention industrial cargoes, as well as petroleum products and oil. As for Iran, it is much more profitable for Tehran to receive goods from the North, where the majority of the country's population lives. It should be noted that before the Baku meeting at the end of July, Deputy foreign Minister of India Sujata Mehta visited Baku in 2016, who also discussed the North-South corridor. Tehran and Delhi held separate talks on this topic [44; p.6-7].

The priority task of the project is to connect the Railways of Azerbaijan and Iran. We talk about the completion of the 172 km long Rasht (Iran) - Astara (Azerbaijan) railway (Qazvin - Rasht - Astara), which is the missing element for uninterrupted Iran - Azerbaijan - Russia communication. This complex infrastructure project with many tunnels, bridges, mountain sections is financed by Iran and Azerbaijan in half **-** half [44; p.6-7].

Within its framework, one of the most important moments is the unification of the Astara Iranian and Astara Azerbaijani Railways - in April 2016, a bridge over the Astarachay river 82.5 metres long was laid, along which two railway tracks are laid [44; p.7-8].

In addition, among the projects jointly implemented by the three countries, it is important to unite the electric power systems of Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia, as well as to create corridors for the transportation of gas from Russia and other Caspian countries [44; p. 8-9].

Most observers of the summit assessed the meeting in Baku for having huge potential. Moreover, it should be noted that the three hydrocarbon powers - Russia, Azerbaijan,

Iran- discussed not "black gold", but focused on transport communications and logistics. And what is important for Azerbaijan is that it turns the country not only into a center of energy cooperation, but also of effective diplomatic cooperation. The "triangles" proposed by Baku as a convenient format of cooperation are really productive, because the dialogue is also on the lines of Azerbaijan-Iran-Turkey, Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey. However, there are also more voluminous "figures", such as Turkey-Russia-Azerbaijan-Kazakhstan [44; p. 9-10].

In March 2016, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree on measures to establish a special economic zone (SEZ), a free trade zone, in the settlement of Alat in the Garadag district of Baku, including the territory of the new Baku international commercial sea port. The work on the creation of SEZ is going go on. At the same time, the first phase of this construction is coming to an end in the port itself. It was expected to be completed by mid-2018. [33;p. 319-335].

The commissioning of the Baku - Tbilisi - Kars (BTK) railway section in mid-2017 has become a new page in railway transportation for Azerbaijan. The connection of the Railways of Azerbaijan and Georgia with Turkey will allow to transport goods from Azerbaijan not only to Turkey, but to the countries of the European Union as well [5].

One of the main tasks of ITC development in Azerbaijan is a real assessment of the necessary investments and their wide attraction.

In summer 2017, the Central Asian regional economic partnership (CAREC) jointly with the Asian Bank presented the road strategy for the Central Asia and Caspian region for 2017-2030.

In particular, the document includes the distribution of necessary investments by implementation periods, as well as the additional list of projects, including international corridors. East-West and North-South» [27].

In December 2017, the conference on "Azerbaijan: a new bridge to Eurasia" was held in Baku, with the participation of representatives of transport departments and railway companies of Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and the other countries. Azerbaijan's transit potential from the point of view of connecting Europe and Asia and connecting Western China with Eastern Europe was discussed, as well as more specific issues - containerization of TRANS-Caspian and Caspian sea transport, investment prospects, transport innovations, integration of railway corridors of different countries, improvement of high-speed trains, cybersecurity and use of renewable energy sources on the railway. All these topics are of great importance for the implementation of the Chinese initiative "Belt and road". This was also discussed at the February 2017 meeting in the Chinese city of Cian, which is historically considered to be the beginning of the great silk road. The Azerbaijani delegation held a presentation "the Role of the TRANS-Caspian international transport corridor in promoting the Belt and road initiative". The main purpose of the presentation was to convey to the audience that the TRANS-Caspian transport corridor is the shortest route, which reduces transportation between China and Europe to 14 days against sea transportation, requiring an at an average of 60. Not to mention the

financial and economic benefits for the participating countries, strengthening stability in the region and increasing the level of employment. An essential part of this project is the creation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars transport corridor, commissioned in October 2017, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines, which ensure the inflow of currency into the economy of both Azerbaijan and Georgia. These projects laid the Foundation for the creation of the southern gas corridor with an estimated length of 3,500 km, increasing the role of Azerbaijan as a supplier of energy resources to Europe [37].

However, the East-West corridor is only one of the elements of Azerbaijan's transport potential. It echoes the project of the transport corridor "North-South", a length of 7200 km and a project price of $ 400 million, which in future means the creation of the South Caucasus transport center. The project involves the construction of railway, road and transport infrastructure from Iran to Russia through Azerbaijan. It is no coincidence that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called Azerbaijan's Railways one of the joint projects with their country. If implemented, the North-South corridor will have a strong impact on the geopolitical order of the region, connecting Iran with Russian Baltic ports and linking Russia's Railways both to the Persian Gulf and through Pakistan, to the Indian railway network [37].

For many years, in Iran there is a talk on the construction of a shipping channel with a length of about 600 km, connecting the Caspian sea with the Persian Gulf. This project, worth about $7 billion, will be used mainly for ships of mixed type "river - sea" and will enable Russia and Eastern Europe to choose an alternative route to the current one via the Bosphorus - Dardanelles-Suez canal and the Red sea. Needless to say, how this will affect the international positions of Azerbaijan, which has the right to expect not only economic benefits, but also the strengthening of its geopolitical potential as a whole and in relation to Armenia in particular. The North-South transport corridor still more isolates Armenia, allowing Iran to connect with Eastern Turkey via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. Russia's interests must also be taken into account. At the beginning of 2017, the volume of cargo transportation in Russian ports of the Caspian basin fell by 48.4% - to the level of 1.1 million tons and in the total volume of cargo turnover of Russian ports (250.3 million tons), the Caspian accounts for less than a percent. During the same period, the volume of cargo of seaports of Azerbaijan amounted to 2,729 million tons, which is 26.1% higher than the same period in last year [37].

Having joined the project of the international transport corridor "North-South", Azerbaijan, first of all, wants, effectively using the favourable geographical characteristics of its land borders, both with Russia and Iran, to develop trilateral regional cooperation and, taking advantage of the existing conditions, to receive new dividends [11; p.4].

The international transport project "North-South" is important in terms of geopolitics, and the same time aimed at the real sector of the economy [9].

In Baku was discussed the implementation of the North-South Transport corridor project and the prospects for regional integration.

The advantages of Azerbaijan's participation in the North – South project are undeniable: the small amount of financial resources needed for laying rails and creating border infrastructure allows to recoup investments in the shortest period. At the same time, it is predicted that with the commissioning of the North – South route, the volume of cargo turnover in the country will be able to reach 6 million tons at the first stage, and up to 15-20 million in future.

The talks between the presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia Ilham Aliyev and Vladimir Putin in Sochi on September 6, 2018 were short but intense. The parties signed 14 intergovernmental and interdepartmental documents, which provide for deepening economic cooperation for the next six years. Among them, five "road maps". The main areas covered by the signed documents are energy, trade, transport, engineering and sports. Both leaders stressed that the level of mutual cooperation corresponds to the nature of strategic partnership [36; p.5].

Commercial trade and economic relations between Azerbaijan and Russia in a priority, as there is a serious interest on the part of the Russian capital in expanding its presence in Azerbaijan. Transport corridors, including the North — South project, play an important role in the signed agreements. The North-South corridor is a strategically important project not only for Russia but also for Azerbaijan. Any transport projects of this kind are not only economic, but also geopolitical objects. Their presence causes some gravity in the issue of foreign policy priorities [36; p.5].

One of the important areas of our cooperation is the transport sector. In 2018, 8 times more cargo was transported along the North-South corridor than in the previous year. Volumes are still small, but the dynamics is impressive [41].

At the first stage, the corridor is planned to transport 5 million tons of cargo per year with further increase to 10 million tons or more.

Azerbaijan is at the crossroads of strategic communications, there are also transport projects in the West — East direction. But such a project as "North-South", connecting Azerbaijan, Russia and Iran, brings positive content primarily to the balance of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. The balance of geo-economic interests, in turn, leads to a balance of geopolitical vectors. We should not forget that in recent years Azerbaijan has invested transport infrastructure, intensively in particular, related to Maritime communications. A large, completely new seaport in Alat has been created. The presence of such kinds of establishments facilities, as well as the further investments in this direction, proves that the Azerbaijani leadership attaches priority importance not only to East — West communications, but to the North-South corridor» as well [36; p.5].

In spring of 2018, a passage was opened on the border of Azerbaijan and Iran across the Astara river (within the North - South ITC). A two-track bridge has been put into operation, the second one is expected to be built. The construction of the railway station and container terminal has also been completed: this year four terminals with an area of over 60 hectares, built with the funds of Azerbaijani investments (about 60 million euros) – grain, dry cargo, for petroleum products and container-will operate on Iranian territory. A significant advance in

the implementation of this international transport corridor (ITC) was the readiness of Azerbaijan to provide a loan in the amount of 500 million US dollars for the construction of a section of the Astara - Rasht railway with length of 164 kilometers [27].

"With the signing of the trilateral Memorandum in Ankara in may 2019, Russia actually joined the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars project. This corridor will be used for transshipment of Russian products (coal, timber, wheat) supplied to Turkish importers, as well as the cargoes from China, Korea and other countries of the Asia-Pacific region transported today via the TRANS-Siberian railway." Moscow will step up its efforts to expand the Azerbaijani transport both in the direction of BTK and in North-South line of MTK» [7].

CJSC "Azerbaijan Railways" (AZD) is defined as the body responsible for the acquisition of land plots for state needs, falling under the construction of the railway line of the Alat-Gasimli section of the international transport corridor "North-South", passing through the territory of Azerbaijan.

The relevant decision was signed by Azerbaijani Prime Minister Novruz Mammadov. JSC azhd should make preparations for the acquisition of land in accordance with the requirements Of the law of the Republic of Armenia "on acquisition of land for state needs" and submit relevant proposals to the Cabinet of Ministers.

Control over the implementation of this decision is entrusted to the Department for regional development, agricultural and environmental issues of the Cabinet ЩГ Ministers [3]. Thus, having formed the railway and port infrastructure of the «silk road» corridors and its North-South part, Azerbaijan will acquire the status of a leading regional transport hub in a year or two. However, attracting the largest possible volume of cargo carriers to the transport potential of the country requires the adoption of a set of measures to form a coherent pricing policy and coordinate the activities of sea and land modes of transport [30].

Currently, the work on the implementation of the existing transport corridor is very intensive, the process has already entered the final phase in the Azerbaijani section. The construction of a new 8.3 km long road of the Astara (AR)-Astara (IRI) railway line to the bridge over the Astarachay river, the bridge over the Astarachay river and the 1.4 km long road in Iran has been completed. Negotiations are being held with the Iranian side in connection with the construction of the Qazvin-Rasht section (175 km) of this corridor [11; p.4].

In the context of moderate energy prices, Azerbaijan is facing an acute problem of diversification of the economy, which is dominated by the oil and gas complex, and the country's budget is mostly formed by revenues from hydrocarbon exports. Transport is recognized as the most priority alternative sector of development in the Republic. It is no coincidence that at the last forum in Davos (January 2019), Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said that the key task of the government is to create a modern infrastructure. "I believe," the Azerbaijani leader stressed, "that using our geographical position, we did the right thing by investing mainly in infrastructure, which will turn Azerbaijan into one of the international hubs, especially since our Republic is the only

country in the world that is a member of two transport corridors - "East-West" and " North-South» [43].

The official opening ceremony of the Qazvin-Rasht section was held on March 6, 2019 to connect Azerbaijan's Railways with the Iranian railway network within the corridor [32].

According to Ali Hasanov, assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan for social and political Affairs, official Baku plans to provide the Iranian side with a loan of $ 500 million for the project of construction and equipping the railway. Work is also underway on another one the Northern direction, the construction of the Samur road bridge (Azerbaijan) - Yarag Kazmalyar (Russia) across the Samur river and the expansion of railway lines. An important section of the corridor-the railway from the Azerbaijani-Russian to the Azerbaijani-Iranian border-has been put into full operational readiness.

Given the special importance of the North-South transport corridor, Azerbaijan has recently invested heavily in the creation of new communications in the direction of Iran and Russia, which has strengthened the country's image as a reliable partner in the international arena [11; p.4].

In terms of the existing project, Baku and Moscow intend to direct further efforts to develop transit traffic in the East-West-East direction-primarily in the communication between Azerbaijan and China by transit through the territory of Russia, as well as between China and other countries by transit through the territory of Russia and Azerbaijan. To reduce the time of delivery of goods, work is planned to optimize border and customs procedures, including electronic data exchange and preliminary information in electronic form. "Russia plans to switch part of the cargo flow, including container traffic, along the TRANS-Siberian railway through Azerbaijan, Georgia to Turkey and further to Europe. This project will be implemented on the basis of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars corridor, noted not so long ago " by Alexander Misharin, first Deputy General Director of Russian Railways, [7; p.38].

Out of the three projects listed, here the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway (BTK), which is the part of a plan to connect the South Caucasus railway with Europe through Turkey, remains the most successful. As part of this plan, Turkey has already built the Marmaray underwater railway tunnel under the Bosphorus Strait in Istanbul, making a direct link with the pan-European railway network feasible. In future, the Baku-Tbilisi - Kars railway line should become a link of the high-speed rail corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia, better known as " East-West» [43; p. 119].

The seriousness of these intentions is also evidenced by the fact that on September 19, 2019, during the plenary meeting of the international Association "Coordination Council for TRANS-Siberian transport" (KSTP) held in the capital of Kazakhstan Nur-Sultan, CJSC "Azerbaijan Railways" (azhd) acquired the status of a full member of the KSTP [7; p.38].

Since the beginning of the implementation of the Europe – Caucasus - Asia (TRACECA) project initiated by the European Union, part of which is the BTK railway corridor, part of the Russian expert community considered these initiatives as a potential competitive

threat. They considered it an attempt to isolate the TRANS-Siberian railway and transfer part of the Chinese cargo traffic to the railway corridor being formed in the countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Subsequently, the infrastructure base of the silk road, created within the framework of the European initiative, became a kind of Foundation for the large-scale transport and logistics system "one belt - one road" being formed by China today» [7; p.38].

However, as the experience of the last decade has shown, almost all initiatives implemented in the Central Asian region and the South Caucasus have not become an alternative to the Russian TRANS-Siberian railway and the Baikal-Amur mainline (BAM). Moreover, neither the southern nor the Northern projects have yet been able to draw any significant part of the cargo flow from the countries of the Asia-Pacific region (APR). At least until recently, the vast bulk of the cargo sent to Europe from the vast and industrialized region of Southeast Asia continues to be handled by sea, passing through the Suez canal or skirting the African continent. And this sea route definitely dominates even taking into account the longer time (30-40 days) for the delivery of goods [7; p.38].

Today, about 90-95% of cargo volumes from Japan, the Republic of Korea and other South-East Asian countries can be accounted for by sea transport, where tariffs remain significantly low and there are no cross-border, customs or technical obstacles for transshipment of goods.

For a long period-in the 90's and partly zero years - the TRANS-Siberian railway, designed to handle 100 million tons of cargo, including 250 thousand containers, was not used at full capacity, and its outdated infrastructure potential required radical modernization.

The situation began to change after the crisis of 2008 and especially with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014, when the vector of economic relations in Moscow began to shift smoothly from West to East. "The traditionally heavily loaded North-Western railway route began to lose traffic volumes, which turned 180° and began to load the TRANS-Siberian railway and BAM. The far East was not ready for such a growth, and just in a few years the capacity of the "steel highways" reached the maximum limit values, " - noted the Chairman of the expert Council of the Russian Institute for research of railway transport problems Pavel Ivankin.

From 2004 to 2018, the volume of transshipment in Russian far Eastern ports actually increased almost three times (from 70 to 180 million tons), but further growth rested on the "bottlenecks"of the railway.

In addition, it is not always possible to consistently maintain the schedule of cargo delivery recommended for the TRANS-Siberian within 20 days. At the same time, Russian Railways has got a firm tariffs set for a period of 6-12 months, while prices for sea transportation are quickly and flexibly regulated by the market and in practice are nearly almost always lower.

Indead, Moscow is trying to overcome these problems, and President Vladimir Putin has initiated a plan to modernize the TRANS-Siberian railway in order to increase its capacity in 2025 to more than 200 million tons per year and double the speed of cargo

transshipment. However, to achieve this result, it is necessary to invest many billions of dollars in the construction of additional paths, tunnels and interchanges, as well as radically change the system of logistics and traffic management [7; p.38].

Azerbaijan's large investments in transport infrastructure and the implementation of a number of important transport projects have further increased the interest of the Chinese government in Azerbaijan.

The agreements signed between China and Azerbaijan and the increase in trade turnover testify to the rapid development of relations between the two countries. These relations are based on the principles of mutual benefit and friendship. China not only invests intensively in the development of the non-oil sector of Azerbaijan, but also opens its vast markets for the export of non-oil products to the country.

The development of China-Azerbaijan relations has also brought led to an increase in commodity circulation trade between the two countries. As a result, China is already one of the four largest trading partners of Azerbaijan.

The commissioning in recent years of the international port in the village of Alat and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway has turned the country into a transport hub connecting Central Asia with the West (Turkey and the European Union) and South Asia (Iran and India) with the North.

The successful implementation of all the planned transport projects of Azerbaijan, as well as the project "one belt - one road" have won the country the image of a reliable partner. The large revenues that our country will receive in the framework of the above-mentioned project will open the way for even greater development of Azerbaijan and will contribute to Azerbaijan becoming an important transit country in world trade.

It should be noted that the freight train China Railway Express, heading from China to Europe via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, passing Istanbul, follows in the direction of Europe through The Marmaray tunnel [21].

Many countries participate in the North-South and East-West transport corridors. But Azerbaijan is the only country among them that participates in both projects and has made a valuable contribution to their implementation. This will bring us both political and economic dividends in future. Cooperation in the field of rail transport brings countries closer together, strengthens security, develops the situation in the region in a more positive direction and brings great economic dividends to each country [7; p.65-78].

Azerbaijan Republic is not going to stop there. According to forecasts, cargo turnover between the EU and China will increase by 2 times by 2030. In order not to stay away from large-scale projects, Azerbaijan invests about $ 5 billion from 2010 to 2022. in the development of Railways.

Most of the funds will be used for the reconstruction and electrification of railway tracks, overhaul of the Baku-Beyuk'kesik railway, renewal of the car fleet, purchase of passenger and freight locomotives [26].

Economic reforms, qualitative changes in administration, infrastructure rating and transit promotion will give impetus to the development of Azerbaijan as a whole. All

this, of course, will become an additional effective factor in the country's further integration into the world economy. [26].

Today, Azerbaijan is an important regional hub, where several major transport corridors intersect. These are" North-South"," West-East", TRACECA, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway corridor. Azerbaijan's transit capabilities are also considered in the context of the effectiveness of the grandiose "one belt, one road" project initiated by China" [4].

Favorable geopolitical and geographical position gave Azerbaijan a chance to receive new dividends equal to dividends from rich hydrocarbon resources [11; p.4].

With the world demand for Azerbaijani oil and gas, the loading of the yellow road, pipelines will not be enough and it will be necessary to return to the construction of pipelines through the Caspian sea and the republics of Central Asia.

Speaking on the development of the transport system of the region, it is impossible not to note the impact on the process of big politics. Thus, the development of highways in the East-West direction is strongly stimulated and supported by the EU countries. The most striking examples are the TRACECA sub-regional projects, as well as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Erzurum trunk pipelines, which are already functioning. The latter continues through the implementation of such gas transportation projects as TANAP and TAP.

The oil industry - the main branch of the Azerbaijani economy-has passed a long way of historical development. Thanks to the inflow of foreign capital, it began to develop rapidly in Azerbaijan from the end of the XIX century, when large oil companies emerged, which together with domestic oil producers controlled the production and sale of oil. At the beginning of the last century, Baku became the main oil center not only of the Russian Empire, but also of the world. During the Soviet period, Azerbaijani oil was the main source of fuel for the USSR. During these years, the economy of the Republic was rapidly developed, a powerful industrial potential was created.

However, despite the fact that oil has played a special role in the development of Azerbaijan, and in particular, Baku, the people have never been masters of this wealth [14; p.207-223; 15; p.1117; 23].

Throughout the twentieth century, oil played the role of the main energy resource. This continues to be the same now today. The influence of oil interests on international relations in General is explained by the deep interrelation of geopolitical issues with the energy security of developed industrial countries. The ever-increasing importance of energy resources in world politics is causing a new aggravation of both hidden and open confrontation between the leading powers for control over them. And these international "games" are now actively involving countries-both owners of energy resources and transit countries.

It is quite clear that the oil – rich Caspian region attracts the attention of key oil consumers-primarily the US, the EU and China, for whom the problem of access to promising energy markets becomes a problem of survival in the conditions of growing crisis phenomena in the world economy.

According to all analysts, Azerbaijan plays a decisive role in the balance of forces around the Caspian sea. It not only possesses large hydrocarbon resources, but also occupies a very advantageous position on the way of transportation of oil and gas from the territory of the entire Caspian basin in the Western direction. All these factors witness that Azerbaijan is mostly interested in peace process in the Caucasus, the establishment of peace, stability and cooperation there as well [16 ; p.168-169; 35].

With the emergence of new independent States in the post-Soviet space, the geography of oil and gas interests of the world's leading States has significantly expanded, covering the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Estimates of potential hydrocarbon reserves in the Caspian region vary widely, but all experts agree on one thing – in the XXI century, the Caspian sea will occupy a prominent place among the world's energy sources. In addition, the geopolitical position of the Caucasus countries is of particular strategic appeal. By virtue of this alone, the desire of the United States and Western countries to gain an economic foothold in the energy-rich zone acquires the character of geostrategic penetration into the sphere affecting the national security of Russia. The entire post-Soviet history shows that the leading countries of the West, primarily the United States, seek to exclude oust Russia from the region. In turn, Russia is interested in maintaining its influence in the South Caucasus [48].

Currently, the South Caucasus and the Caspian region as a whole, due to its geopolitical weight, geostrategic benefits and geo-economic (primarily energy) attractiveness, is becoming the region where the greatest degree of competition and struggle for the influence of the main global centers of power. Firstly, the Caspian region has an exceptionally advantageous location in the center of Eurasia. A significant part of the conflict zones and the zones with permanent instability adjoins the Caspian region, or Afghanistan, Iraq and others are in close proximity to it. Consequently, the geostrategic weight of the Caspian region as a kind of bridgehead increases, the control over which allows to influence more effectively the proceeding processes in many of these "near nuclear" or potentially "hot" areas [13, p. 56-57].

Secondly, the Caspian region has a great value of strategic importance as an important hub of transport communications. The energy resources of the Caspian were at the center of a complex knot of conflicting interests of many countries. Speaking on the influence of geopolitical factors on the formation of world energy markets, it is impossible to ignore such major players as the United States, the European Union and China [38].

For Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, oil and gas deposits are almost the only real source of means for survival, overcoming social and economic problems. Not having sufficient possibilities for the development of these fields on their own, they set a course for cooperation with Western companies. In turn, Georgia actively used the fact that its territory is the shortest route for the delivery of Caspian hydrocarbons to the markets of Western Europe through Turkey, bypassing Russia.

The leadership of the young States of the region decided to play the "oil card" to attract the attention of the West (primarily the United States) and, with its support, to get rid of

the guardianship of Moscow. It should be noted here that key deposits in the Caspian sea were discovered during the Soviet era, but were not developed, furthermore.

Western countries have tried to make the most of the current situation not only to stake out the lion's share of Caspian hydrocarbons for the future, but also to create suitable geopolitical conditions for gradually increasing their strategic presence in this part of the post-Soviet space.

One of the most important tasks of the geopolitical level for the West was to create and ensure the reliable operation of the Eurasian transport corridor, the main component of which should be the energy corridor. Having ensured its functioning, they can solve several important problems of both geo-economic and geopolitical nature with the benefit for the oil-consuming countries of the West, and, above all, for themselves.

Among the purely economic motives: diversification of energy export sources; removal of the urgency of energy security problems for Western consumers; reduction of dependence on middle Eastern oil; facilitation of Caspian oil supplies to the world market, avoiding traffic jams in the Bosphorus Strait [13].

Among the political motive: to weaken Russia's ties with oil-producing countries of the region, giving them the energy transportation routes to bypass Russia; to direct oil and gas flows to bypass Iran; to create a basis independent from Russia, but dependent on the United States and the West cooperation of the countries of the southern Caucasus with the subsequent involvement of the States of Central Asia, thereby ensuring long-term binding of these States to US interests in the Caspian region; to weaken its own energy dependence on the supply of oil resources from Saudi Arabia, thereby gaining a trump card in the oil game with Riyadh; to strengthen the position of a key transit country of Caspian hydrocarbons and its regional ally – Turkey. In addition, laying of the pipeline to the politically unstable countries of the South Caucasus has become an occasion for the expansion of the presence of NATO armed forces in the region [13; p.59-60].

The idea of sending oil and gas from the fields discovered in the Caspian sea and Central Asia to the world market along a route not controlled by Russia was motivated primarily by the geopolitical interests of the United States and Britain. These two powers, acting since the end of the XIX century on the world stage, as a rule, in tandem, sought, first, to weaken Russia's influence in the Caucasus and the Caspian region, and secondly, to put under their control all the post-Soviet energy resources and raw materials from the post-Soviet space [12; p.84-110].

As a result, in the region almost immediately after the collapse of the USSR, influential non-regional players appeared in the face of the United States, great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, China and the other countries for which Caspian hydrocarbons are of an undoubted interest.

It is characteristic that the United States and its key Western European satellites have developed and proposed a number of routes for the Caspian oil and gas to reach the world markets bypassing Russia for rather a short time.

With the signing of the "contract of the century" by President Heydar Aliyev on September 20, 1994, the oil production strategy began to develop more dynamically. The contract was concluded with 33 companies from 15 States, which invested 60 billion us dollars. "Contract of the century" was the beginning of further development of oil and gas strategy of Azerbaijan [46, p. 38].

An important role was played by deep-sea deposits "Azeri Chirag" and "Shah Deniz". Moreover, Azerbaijan has already achieved its first successes: the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku – Tbilisi – Erzurum gas pipeline were put into operation, through which oil and gas from offshore fields began to flow into the oil and gas pipeline network of Turkey. They became a link in the pipeline system, through which oil and gas will continue to flow from Central Asia and Azerbaijan through Turkey to Europe [48; p. 135].

The head of our state is constantly taking all necessary measures to protect and strengthen the independence of Azerbaijan. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline is one of the striking examples of this. The importance of this oil pipeline connecting Azerbaijan with the Caucasian country – fraternal Georgia, as well as with other European States, is not limited to the economic ties of the participating countries, but also lies in the fact that it contributes to the rapprochement of the cultures of these peoples. The political significance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline outweighs all other aspects of this ambitious international project [17; p.188].

We are talking about the Nabucco project and the associated TRANS-Caspian gas pipeline, the construction of which was opposed by Russia and Iran, citing the unresolved status of the Caspian sea. As a result the project was closed after long discussions [19].

The first major projects put into operation were the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline was completed in the spring of 2006. Since July 2007, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline has been functioning, through which the "blue fuel" produced at The Azerbaijani Shah Deniz field on the Caspian shelf began to flow into the gas system of Turkey.

Further prospects for the development of oil and gas production in Azerbaijan are mainly associated with offshore fields. 28 oil and gas fields have been discovered in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian sea, and more than 130 promising structures have been identified.

The increase in energy exports is of great importance for Baku, contributing to the rapid growth of gross domestic product and defense potential. It is not by chance that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev addressed his people on the occasion of reaching the Azerbaijani oil terminal in Ceyhan. He called the commissioning of the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan export oil pipeline, named after his father Heydar Aliyev, a historic event of world importance [24].

As the timing of the export of Azerbaijani gas through the BTE pipeline approached, Baku's position in relation to neighbouring natural gas producing countries became more and more noticeable. If in the late 1990s Azerbaijan sought to "isolate" itself from

them, relying mainly on the export of its own raw materials, now Baku is opening a "green" corridor for the transit of Kazakh and Turkmen gas through its territory to Europe. The Azerbaijani leaders stated the need to revive the idea of the TRANS-Caspian gas pipeline (TCG) for the supply of Turkmen and Kazakh gas through Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's new proposals have found support in Europe-especially since the contradictions between the EU and Russia are intensifying in the formation of an energy security strategy. All this strengthened the Europeans ' intention to find new sources of supplies and routes bypassing Russia.

The beginning of 2007 was marked by a sharp deterioration of the energy dialogue between Azerbaijan and Russia. The meeting of the heads of government of the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan in early December 2006 coincided with the cooling of relations between the two countries, which are largely determined by their policy towards Georgia. Close cooperation between Baku and Tbilisi is unprofitable for Moscow. If the relations between Aliyev and Saakashvili have so far generally satisfied Moscow (Azerbaijan has maintained an emphatically restrained attitude towards Georgia), the events of 2006, when Baku supported Tbilisi in the confrontation with Gazprom, promising to do everything possible to provide Georgia with gas, could not but irritate the Kremlin. Azerbaijan's continued energy dependence on Russia was once again used as a mechanism of influence. Thus, in mid-November 2006, RAO UES warned the Azerbaijani side that it was going to reduce the supply of electricity from 300 MW to 60 MW. In addition, Gazprom insisted on increasing the cost of gas from $ 110. For 1 thousand cubic meters to 230 dollars. in 2007.

Baku's response was not long in coming: in January 2006, the Republic announced its refusal to purchase Russian gas at an "inflated" price. In addition, oil transportation through the Baku – Novorossiysk pipeline was suspended. Thus, the oil industry reacted to the December statement of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on the need to introduce tough measures to protect the country's energy security.

Meanwhile, life is making adjustments to Baku's plans. Thus, in connection with the fighting in Georgia in August 2008, Azerbaijan actually lost the opportunity to export hydrocarbons bypassing Russia. This has already led to the discussion of the resumption of Azerbaijani oil supplies through Novorossiysk [13, p.67].

In any case, it is obvious that Azerbaijan aspires to energy independence from Russia and already in 2007 for the first time in the XXI century was able to meet all its basic needs for motor fuel and energy carriers at the expense of its own energy resources – oil products, natural and associated petroleum gas.

In 2007, the country had 10.135 billion cubic meters of "blue fuel", of which 9.172 billion cubic meters were planned to be used for domestic needs. A number of factors allowed Azerbaijan to improve some energy indices. Firstly, due to the reconstruction and modernization of pipelines and gas distribution system, gas losses are constantly reduced. Thus, if in 1990 they amounted to 1.579 billion cubic meters (6.35% of the gas balance), in 2004 they decreased to 0.501 billion cubic meters (4.95). Secondly, the transition to a payment system based on actual consumption (for this purpose, a

campaign to install gas meters began a few years ago) forces the population and enterprises to use this energy resource more rationally.

Thirdly, in Azerbaijan, there is a consistent modernization of old thermal power plants and the construction of new economical steam and gas generating stations.

The future situation in the fuel market largely depended on the plans of the State oil company of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOCAR), which planned to produce 8 billion cubic meters of gas annually. If we add to this volume another 1.5 billion cubic meters of Shah Deniz hydrocarbons, which are put to Azerbaijan for transit to Turkey, and associated gas of the Azeri – Chirag – Gunashli project (from 1.4 to 2.7 billion cubic meters per year), the gas balance can reach from 10.9 to 12.2 billion cubic meters. If the real gas resources in 2014 will be less than predicted, the shortage of raw materials for thermal power plants, as before, can be compensated with heating oil. At the same time, Azerbaijan occupies advantageous position in negotiations with Russia. Possessing significant hydrocarbon reserves, Baku is aware of the possibility of conducting a relatively independent foreign policy. The implementation of two major infrastructure projects that allowed Azerbaijan to transport oil and gas to Europe bypassing Russia (the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline) enabled the Republic to use this factor as a tool for pursuing an independent policy from Russia [2; p.101–103; 18; p.110-125].

In this situation, some hypothetical gas transport projects initiated by the Central Asian countries and supported by the EU may well pass into the category of really considered and feasible. In any case, the tendency towards rapprochement of the West with the South Caucasus and Central Asia without Russia's participation is becoming more tangible and is filled with concrete actions.

In mid-August 2007, an agreement was signed in Baku with the participation of us Deputy Secretary of state for energy and economy Daniel Sullivan, under which the US allocates a grant of $ 1.7 million to the state Oil company of Azerbaijan. to prepare a feasibility study of two TRANS-Caspian pipelines. According to them, Kazakh oil and Turkmen gas will flow to Europe through Azerbaijani territory.

This agreement testified not only to the political but also to the economic support of the United States for the TRANS-Caspian pipelines. By financing the feasibility study project, the US has not only demonstrated its interest in the TRANS-Caspian pipelines, but also signaled to investors that it is possible to invest in this project. US is ready to minimize the political, economic and military risks that may arise during the construction of the pipeline along the Caspian sea through the territory of Azerbaijan to Turkey and then to Europe [29].

With the launch of the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku – Tbilisi – Erzurum gas pipeline, Azerbaijan declared itself as a major alternative supplier of hydrocarbons to Europe to Russia. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan's oil and gas reserves are not evidently enough for all the contracts for the supply of hydrocarbons to Europe, in which Baku would like to participate. In these circumstances, it was strategically important for Azerbaijan to become a transit country for hydrocarbons – this will allow it to maintain

the status of an important link in the Central Asia-Europe energy corridor, bypassing Russia for a long term [8].

At the same time, the preparation of feasibility studies of pipelines does not guarantee the accession of Central Asian States to these projects. US activity in this direction is most likely an element of pressure on Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, for which joining the TRANS-Caspian pipeline system would mean reorientation of hydrocarbon flows only to the West, while both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan pursue a policy of diversification of supply routes.

However, after the signing of the agreement between Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on the construction of the Caspian gas pipeline with a capacity of 20 billion cubic meters of gas per year in Moscow on December 20, 2007, it became clear that this winning role of transit went to others.

As for the Shah Deniz stage 1, Azerbaijan received almost 50% of the gas produced under This project in 2007. In 2008 and in subsequent years, Baku will not be able to count on such a gas balance – obligations to Ankara will force the promised 6.6 billion cubic meters of gas to be exported to Turkey annually from the project maximum of 8.6 billion cubic meters (in 2008, Shah Deniz plans to produce 8 billion cubic meters of gas) [13, p.70].

The Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline is becoming an alternative source of natural gas for a number of Gazprom's current and potential customers. Thus, in the post-Soviet space, where the monopoly on natural gas exports was held by Russia, the formation of the "club of independent exporters" began.

The first consumers were Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. In future, BTE is aimed at the markets of Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Israel and possibly some other European countries. In most of these countries, Azerbaijani gas will compete with Russian gas. In this case, Azerbaijani gas has got one distinct competitive advantage of Russian it is cheaper.

Under the terms of the purchase and sale of Shah Deniz gas, fixed prices cannot be changed for at least a year from the beginning of export. Subsequently, the parties may revise the cost of gas based on oil prices. However, if we take into account that the distance of transportation by BTE is smaller compared to Russian supplies, then in future Azerbaijani gas will remain cheaper than Gazprom's.

In this regard, the issue of transit of imported gas, including Azerbaijani gas, to Europe is becoming increasingly urgent-a prospect that is actively supported by the EU and the US [13, p.106].

The release of Azerbaijani gas to European markets is associated with the implementation of the second phase of the Shah Deniz development project, in which production is expected to increase to 16 billion cubic meters per year. BP initially started production on the second stage in 2012. Baku insists on accelerating the project. The goal is clear-to pass ahead of Gazprom.

SOCAR experts believe that the reserves of Shah Deniz as a result of exploration can be increased by 1.5-2 times and reach 2 trillion.in addition, Baku considers deep deposits in

the contract areas of the ACG block, which are not subject to the "Contract of the century", as a reserve for increasing gas production.

The Nabucco project is again on the agenda, and its main part is the construction of the Caspian gas pipeline.

The history of the TRANS-Caspian project began in 1997, when the United States de facto declared the Black sea-Caspian region a zone of its strategic interests. One of the most important elements of the US strategy in this region was the creation of a new architecture of pipelines bypassing the territories of Russia and Iran. In order to counter the Russian Blue stream project, the US government has allocated $ 750,000 to Turkmenistan. on preparation of feasibility study of the alternative project of the gas pipeline and 595 thousand dollars. for consulting services.

The project, designed to transfer gas from Turkmenistan to Turkey, provided for the construction of a gas pipeline with length of 2 thousand km along the bottom of the Caspian sea (at a depth of 200-300 mm) to Baku, then through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Erzurum (Turkey). In particular, the territory of Turkmenistan – 715 km, the bottom of the Caspian sea-300 km, Azerbaijan-408 km, Georgia-200 km, Turkey-320 km.annually it was planned to export 16 billion cubic meters of gas to Turkey and 14 billion cubic meters to European markets [23].

During Saparmurat Niyazov's presidency, Ashgabat, long opposed to the TRANS-Caspian pipeline, finally signaled interest in the project.

In November 1999, the presidents of Turkmenistan, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia signed an interstate quadripartite agreement on the construction of the TRANS-Caspian gas pipeline. With the participation of such kind of well-known companies as General Electric, Bechtel and Shell, the PSG consortium is being created. The construction of the pipeline was planned to be completed in 2002. However, the parties failed to agree on the terms of construction. Turkmenistan, in particular, insisted on receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in advance payment for the implementation of the contract, which did not suit PSG. In addition, Baku failed to reach an agreement with Ashgabat on quotas for pumping Azerbaijani gas through the future pipeline. As a result, all work on the pipeline was curtailed [50].

Resuscitation of the TRANS-Caspian gas pipeline project with the intention of its implementation until 2010 caused great doubts not only from the resource point of view. The main obstacles were the lack of economic justification, the lack of legal status of the Caspian sea, as well as the difficulty of laying a pipe along the bottom of the Caspian sea, through the mountains and gorges of the Caucasus, through areas of seismic and political instability.

Russia prevented to this.

At the same time, Ashgabat, Baku, Ankara and Washington were well aware that hydrocarbon export routes are an effective lever in the region. The struggle for the TRANS-Caspian pipeline is not removed from the agenda, but it is necessary to look and for other ways to solve this issue [20].

The southern gas corridor (SGC) project is on the agenda. The essence of the project "southern gas corridor": the project of expansion of the South Caucasus gas pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, through which only Azerbaijani gas will reach Turkey, and its continuation will be: Transatlantic and Transadreatic gas pipelines-TANAP and TAR. Accordingly, TANAP - from Turkey to Bulgaria and then to Europe. TAR - from Turkey through Greece, Albania to southern Italy and then to Europe [18, p. 110-125].

TANAP connects the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey route with the TAR pipeline, and by continuing from there it will benefit the countries along it-Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Naturally, taking all these steps, it is necessary to emphasize that this is a regional project, a project of peace. It is impossible to deny the efforts of Georgia in this matter, from the territory of which the exit to Anatolia is carried out [1; p.5].

In General, the TAP project in our territory remained small work. Everything is being done to complete the construction of the Albanian section of the pipeline within the established schedule [1; p. 5].

The Azerbaijani government is also confident that with the completion of TAP construction, the southern gas corridor will be completely operational in 2020 [1; p.5].

Also, within the framework of the SGC, the option of the TRANS-Caspian gas pipeline, through which gas from Turkmenistan should go to Europe, is being considered. Its main goal is to increase the security of gas supplies to Europe, excluding Russia as a monopolist in the role of supplier, and Ukraine as a monopolist in the role of gas transit.

The declared cost of the project is about $ 50 billion. The TANAP project signing agreement took place on June 26, 2012, and TAR in December 2013. The length of the first 1800 km, and the second 520 km [49].

Indeed, to ensure the full-scale work of the SGC, it remains only to wait for the completion of the construction of the TAR gas pipeline, so that Azerbaijani gas begins to flow to Europe, or rather to Italy, through Greece, Albania and the Adriatic sea. Thus, the influence of Azerbaijan and Turkey in the region will increase ever more. Moreover, with the implementation of the southern gas corridor project, Azerbaijan will become an important player in the European gas market. Due to the fact that UGK is an alternative to Russian gas, in terms of route and sources of supply, its European segment-the TRANS-Adriatic pipeline worth 4.5 billion euros is one of the priority energy projects for the European Union. The project provides for the initial transportation of 10 billion cubic meters of gas per year from Stage-2 to the EU countries. The total length of TAR is 878 km, of which 550 km will pass through the Northern part of Greece, 215 km - through the territory of Albania, 105 km-through the Adriatic sea and 8 km - through the territory of Italy. Shareholders of the project are: BP (20%), SOCAR (20%), Fluxys (19%), Enagas (16%) and Axpo (5%). According to the TAP AG consortium, at the end of October 2019, the TRANS Adriatic pipeline project is 90.5% complete [1; p. 5].

Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and possibly Iraq are expected to be the main suppliers. In future, Iran and Egypt may be included, but at the moment the political situation in these countries does not allow them to be included in the project. The key transit country will

be Turkey, other transit routes will pass through the Black sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. The first deliveries were planned to start from the beginning in 2018 to Turkey, and then in 2019 to Europe. Expected by 2020, supplies through the southern gas corridor will cover approximately 10-20% of the EU's gas needs, which will be approximately 45-90 billion. cubic meters of gas per year [42].

The prospects for the southern gas corridor look more promising than ever. Especially if we take into account the fact that the construction of interconnectors has already begun on the territory of Europe, through which it will be possible to deliver Azerbaijani gas to customers coming through the TAP. In particular, we talk about the laying of the gas pipeline Greece-Bulgaria (Gas Interconnector Greece – Bulgaria, IGB). IGB is one of the seven priority projects to ensure the security and competitiveness of the energy market in the European Union. The project is also important in terms of diversification of gas sources and supplies for Bulgaria and the South-Eastern Europe region. IGB is part of the vertical Gas Corridor. VGC), which will connect the networks of Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Hungary. Even its extension to Ukraine, Moldova and Serbia is considered [1; p. 6].

The TRANS-Anatolian pipeline (TANAP) project is ongoing. "72% of the project works have been completed and it is expected that the pipeline will be put into operation in 2018," Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said at the opening of the XXIV international exhibition and conference "Caspian Oil and gas-2017" and the VII Caspian international exhibition of energy and alternative energy. The head of state stressed that The "contract of the century" signed in 1994 is a historic project, that if the "southern gas corridor" had not been implemented, there would not have been today's successes of Azerbaijan. He further stressed that "the implementation of the Shah Deniz project has turned Azerbaijan into a country that produces and exports both oil and gas" [39].

An important role in the completion of the TANAP project belongs to the implementation of the Shah Deniz - 2 project, which will bring closer the completion of the South Caucasus pipeline, which is being implemented on schedule.

Azerbaijani gas supplies to Turkey from the Shah Deniz - 2 field were planned in 2018, and gas pipelines should reach Europe by 2020. As a result, Europe will receive new sources of gas supply from the Caspian region through Turkey.

However, the organizers have got doubts that prevent the reorganization of the project. First of all, the project of the Turkish flow from Russia, the unreliability of Turkey as a transit country, the problem of filling the pipe from Turkmenistan, uncertainty in the forecasts for gas in the EU and many other reasons.

The TAR project has been implemented by 42 % and is projected to be delivered on time. The completion of the Sangachal terminal plays an important role in the transportation of Azerbaijani gas and oil.

On November 30, 2019, Azerbaijani and Turkish presidents Ilham Aliyev and Recep Tayyip Erdogan solemnly launched the second and final phase of TANAP in the town of Ipsala. Thus, the leaders of the two countries confirmed the full readiness of the 1,850 km infrastructure for gas supplies to Europe [1; p.4].

Today, Azerbaijan's natural gas, having passed through 20 provinces, 67 districts and 600 villages of our country, has reached the gates of Europe, that is, to this place. Thanks to TANAP, the transfer of 16 billion cubic meters of Azerbaijan's natural gas to Turkey and Europe has turned from myth to reality[1; p. 4-5].

It is a section of the TRANS-Anatolian gas pipeline from Eskisehir to the Turkish-Greek border. This was preceded by a test injection of Azerbaijani gas into this section of the pipe, which began on April 15, 2019, to check its readiness for work. On June 15, gas from the Shah Deniz field via TANAP has already reached the Turkish-Greek border [1; p. 5].

As is known, the capacity of TANAP at the initial stage is designed to transport at least 16 billion cubic meters, of which 10 billion is intended for Europe, and 6 billion-for the Western regions of Turkey. In future, the annual capacity of the pipeline will be increased to 24 billion, and then to 31 billion cubic meters. Shareholders of the TANAP project are SOCAR (51%), SOCAR Turkiye Enerji (7%), BOTAS (30%), BP (12%). The pipeline will bring $1.45 billion in revenues to TANAP shareholders annually, of which Azerbaijan will account for 58%. Turkey is also expected to cover 12% of its gas needs through the pipeline [1; p. 5].

It should be recalled that Azerbaijani gas from the stage-2 development of the Shah Deniz field has been successfully supplied to the Turkish market since June 30, 2018 and as of November 25 this year, 3.3 million cubic meters of gas have already been transported. According to SOCAR's estimates for 2019 deliveries by TANAP provided for $ 3 billion. meanwhile, from June 2019 until the end of June 2020, the supply of gas through this pipeline was provided in the amount of 4 billion cubic meters, starting from the end of June 2020 the annual volume of gas supplies through TANAP will be 6 billion cubic meters for Turkey. [1; p. 5].

The pipeline will connect Bulgaria to the TRANS Adriatic gas pipeline (TAP) and allow the country to receive gas from Azerbaijan. The length of the gas pipeline between Bulgaria and Greece is 182 km, of which 150 km pass through the territory of Bulgaria. Its technical capacity at the initial stage will be 3 billion cubic meters per year, and in future can be brought to 5.5 billion cubic meters. The total cost of the project is estimated at 220 million euros [1; p. 6].

The Bulgarian government expects that the IGB, construction of which began in may this year, will allow the country to receive Azerbaijani gas from the Shah Deniz field in 2020 [1; p.6].

No later than 2020, Bulgaria will be able to receive liquefied gas from the United States, Qatar, Cyprus, Egypt, as well as natural gas from Azerbaijan [1; p.6].

In Bulgaria, Azerbaijani gas is considered to be one of the possible sources for distribution through the Balkan gas hub, thus ensuring diversification of supplies and competition in the European energy market. By the way, under the contract for the supply of natural gas signed between Bulgargaz and SOCAR, from 2020 Bulgaria will receive annually 1 billion cubic meters of natural gas from the stage-2 development of the Shah Deniz field [1; p.6-7].

The list of those wishing to receive natural gas from Azerbaijan through the southern gas corridor is growing. Now it includes Ukraine. Azerbaijan is becoming an increasingly strong player, including in the context of energy [1; p.7].

With the commissioning of the TAR and IGB gas pipelines, conditions will be created for the transportation of Azerbaijani gas to the countries of South-Eastern Europe. With the accession of Romania to the SGC project in the future, Kiev will have the opportunity to receive Azerbaijani energy resources on the route Bulgaria-Romania-Ukraine [1; p.7].

Azerbaijani gas is already in great demand almost all over Europe, an incredibly positive factor for the country's economy. After all, in the long term, this fuel will prevail in the list of demand in the world. Therefore, as President Ilham Aliyev rightly noted in Ipsal, TANAP and the southern gas corridor are also energy security projects [1; p.7].

Yes, today, when trade wars, political and economic confrontations are on the agenda of the world today, TANAP manages to reconnect Europe with Asia [1; p.7].

Forecasts show that the international transport corridors "East-West", "North-South" and TAP will contribute to the development of trade with Europe, Russia, Central Asia, the Caucasus region to the Persian Gulf and India, the Caspian countries with ports of the Black sea. The same corridor will facilitate rail transport and land and transit between Europe-South Asia-the Middle East, as well as create conditions for increasing profits.

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